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MORE ABOUT ROASTING TURKEY

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A radio conversation between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday, December 8, 1938, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home program, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 93 associate radio stations.

WALLACE KADDERLY:

Yes, Everett Mitchell, Ruth Van Deman's on hand and we're going to have something to say about food. And it's about that king of all foods, that bird of all birds---roast turkey. But in place of a turkey on a platter all Ruth seems to have brought with her today is a handful of letters. No turkey, Ruth, out in the wings somewhere---

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

No, not in the wings or on the wing. Too bad, Wallace, we can't have a turkey to carve every week. And that Monday before Thanksgiving when we did have one up here, there was so much talk about the carving I couldn't say very much about the cooking. Maybe you didn't notice---

KADDERLY:

I'm afraid I didn't notice anything but the turkey.

VAN DEMAN:

I understand, perfectly. But a lot of listeners who have turkeys to cook want to know more about oven temperatures, and roasting pans, and so on. That's the how of these letters. So if you'll be the Lord High Questioner---

KADDERLY:

You'll be Honorable Lady with Answers.

VAN DEMAN:

I'll try. I have Lucy Alexander's directions here in case I get stuck. They cover everything from selecting the turkey to making giblet gravy.

KADDERLY:

Those are the directions we offered our listeners the day we carved the turkey?

VAN DEMAN:

The very same---only we've added another page about carving, and put in some diagrams.

KADDERLY:

Diagrams with dotted lines?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, sir, dotted lines showing exactly where to put the knife.

KADDERLY:

Good. I want to have a look at that turkey map before I operate on the

(over)

Kadderly's Christmas bird. Does it show where the oyster is?

VAN DEMAN:

There isn't any X to mark the spot. But you won't have any trouble locating it in that little hollow on the outside of the back (the small of the back, as Mike Rowell says) after you take off the leg section.

KADDERLY:

I'm afraid I cut down through it and serve it as part of the dark meat.

VAN DEMAN:

Lots of people do; no harm done. It is dark meat, and there're only about two bites in each little oyster-shaped piece.

KADDERLY:

But they're extra delicious bites.

VAN DEMAN:

None better. Turkey tenderloin, some people call it. But, Wallace, this isn't getting us on very fast with these cooking questions.

KADDERLY:

Okay. Well, shall I start with the top and work down?

VAN DEMAN:

Anywhere.

KADDERLY:

Here's a card postmarked Denver, Colorado. I won't read the writer's name, but she says: "What do you mean by a constant moderate oven? I heard all but the important part the oven temperature at the start of roasting the turkey."

VAN DEMAN:

She's certainly right, the oven temperature is the most important. Well, if the turkey's a nice young fat one, say over 10 but under 14 pounds, market weight, the best temperature for the oven is 300 degrees all the time the turkey's cooking.

KADDERLY:

How many hours does that take?

VAN DEMAN:

About 3 to 3-1/2 hours. For a small bird (one that weighs 8 to 10 pounds), it's better to step the oven up to 325 degrees.

KADDERLY:

Then the smaller turkeys cook in a hurry?

VAN DEMAN:

No, funny thing, it takes a 9-pound turkey almost as long to roast as a 12-pound bird. It's well to allow full 3 hours for a 9-pound bird, when the oven's 325.

For the larger birds, 14 pounds to 18 pounds, it's better to drop the oven to 275 degrees. A fine prosperous 16 pounder may take as much as 5 hours to roast slowly that way. But the result is worth it. The juice stays in. White meat and dark meat cook evenly and tender all through. The skin gradually takes on that beautiful golden brown bloom. And the drippings in the pan are just right to make gravy---not burned but well browned.

KADDERLY:

The makin's for good gravy---that answers this next question, I guess---from Alabama. "Will there be enough stock for making dressing if you use this new way of roasting turkey?"

VAN DEMAN:

That one puzzled me a little. Maybe it goes back to the old custom of cooking the turkey in one pan, and the seasoned bread crumbs separately in another, not putting the stuffing into the bird.

KADDERLY:

I should think the turkey would dry out more that way, and not look so plump and handsome on the platter.

VAN DEMAN:

You're right. Even when we're cooking the experimental birds for taste tests, and don't add any seasoning that might change the flavor of the meat, we stuff them with plain bread crumbs. They cook much better stuffed and trussed up snugly to keep the wings and legs close to the body.

KADDERLY:

Next question. LaPorte, Indiana, wants to know "how can a turkey be turned without breaking the skin?"

VAN DEMAN:

Easily enough. Just take two clean folded cloths and use them like holders. With these thick cloths to protect your hands, you can lift the turkey right up by the head and foot, and flip it over. Much better than by trying to use forks, or tongs, or anything that might break the skin and let out the juice.

And, by the way, we start the turkey roasting back up and breast down. Then turn it from side to side, and finally finish with the breast on top. That keeps the skin on the breast from browning too much.

KADDERLY:

What about the roasting pan? This next letter here says: "Did I hear you straight when you said roast a turkey in an open pan, without a cover?" (The emphasis is mine)

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, that's what I said, for a fat young turkey, well buttered and floured. You can use any kind of a big shallow roasting pan, with a rack. The wire ones you cool cake on are fine. All you want is some kind of an open rack to keep the turkey from resting flat on the bottom of the pan.

Then it does that the skin's likely to stick and the turkey cooks faster where it touches the hot pan. But if air can circulate all around it, it cooks more evenly. About every half hour or so a turkey needs to be taken out of the oven and basted with melted butter or turkey fat.

KADDERLY:

I'd just like to ask one on my own here. How'd the word baste ever come to have anything to do with cooking?

VAN DEMAN:

Just an old French custom, I believe. The French have a word that sounds something like baste, and means to moisten or pour on. And that's what the hot fat does when you spoon it up over the turkey--keeps it moist.

KADDERLY:

I see. And you use fat, not water. Water draws juice out of meat.

VAN DEMAN:

Right. We'll have you a scientific turkey cook yet.

KADDERLY:

Thanks for the vote of confidence. But there's one thing I'm not quite clear on about that constant-moderate oven. Do you just set the oven regulator at 300 degrees and let her go?

VAN DEMAN:

Always providing the oven has a regulator.

KADDERLY:

Yes, I realize not every oven has a thermostatic control.

VAN DEMAN:

Even when they have, the regulator and the oven temperature don't always jibe exactly. We have regulators on our ovens in the experimental kitchen, but we use thermometers in the ovens too, set right by the roasting pans. You can put a portable thermometer like that in any oven--oil stove, coal range, any kind.

KADDERLY:

I thought you must have some way of double checking on that oven temperature.

VAN DEMAN:

Of course, even the oven thermometers get a little temperamental sometimes. But any of these devices are a lot better than putting the hand in the oven and trying to "feel" whether it's hot enough to roast a turkey. Does that finish the turkey questions?

KADDERLY:

Just about, I think, in this batch of letters. But there are 16 more asking days before the Christmas bird goes into the oven. Have you a good big supply of those recipes and carving diagrams on hand?

VAN DEMAN:

I think so.

KADDERLY:

Then I'm going to start the barrage again. I'm going to suggest to our listeners if they're interested in the modern way of roasting turkey that they write the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

VAN DEMAN:

Certainly, we're all for juicier and browner turkeys on Christmas platters. If these new cooking methods will help, we're glad to send them. But I do hope the requests will come soon. The Christmas rush is slowing up the mails more every day. And far be it from us to compete with Santa Claus.

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